

## **CHAPTER 16**

### **EDUCATION FOR FOREIGN SERVICE CHILDREN**

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#### **SUMMARY OF RESOURCES**

#### **SELECTING A SCHOOL**

You may choose whichever type of school best suits your family. There are allowances to support:

- Home schooling
- School at post
- School away from post
- Special needs children
- Private instruction with proper authorization

Supplementary instruction allowances are also available to supplement at-post education allowances. The amounts of these allowances vary from post to post, so please verify before making any important decisions.

#### **EDUCATION ALLOWANCES**

The Foreign Service provides an education allowance for children from kindergarten through grade 12 when the family is living outside of the United States. This allowance is

intended to provide an education similar to what you would receive free in the States if your children were attending public schools. Parents are expected to pay preschool or college costs, just as they would in the States. You can find these allowances explained in the Department of State Standardized Regulations (DSSR) 270 (<http://www.state.gov/m/a/als/c1843.htm>). There is also a Travel Allowance, DSSR 280, which provides travel for college-age students to visit their families overseas. (See also Chapter 3, “Allowances.”)

## **EDUCATION AT POST**

Many Foreign Service children accompany their parents to a post abroad and attend whichever school is available. These schools can vary from home schooling to a Department of Defense school to an American school to one that follows the curriculum of another country and is not taught in English—or anything in between.

The family chooses which school to use. Sometimes there is clearly one school that is right for your children. Many times, however, there may be several choices to consider. You should begin this research as soon as possible. There are several places to begin the search:

- The Office of Overseas Schools (A/OPR/OS) (<http://www.state.gov/m/a/os/>) includes one-page fact sheets on the 182 schools assisted by the Department of State. Through these fact sheets, you can link to a school’s Web site and e-mail. In addition, A/OPR/OS publishes a CD-ROM containing information on about 600 schools and preschools around the world, including the assisted schools, and, in some cases, a description of the local educational system. It is available at all posts, OBC, FLO, A/OPR/OS, and the Employee Service Lounge (see “Resources” below). This information is gathered at posts by the Community Liaison Office (CLO) Coordinator and compiled by A/OPR/OS in Washington. It is factual information that gives basic information, including school size, location, curriculum, student body make-up, facilities available, and so on. It does not describe every detail but provides a terrific way to start the search. A/OPR/OS also maintains a small library containing yearbooks, newsletters, other publications, school profiles, curriculums, and a few videotapes.
- The Overseas Briefing Center has boxes of information on each post. Some of the information can be obtained by e-mailing [FSIOBCInfoCenter@state.gov](mailto:FSIOBCInfoCenter@state.gov). Post reports, education reports, school brochures, KidVids (videos of posts produced by children at post), applications, and other information should be available.
- The Education and Youth Officer at the Family Liaison Office is an advocate for Foreign Service families on educational issues and the emotional well being of our Foreign Service children. This office can help you sort out your educational options, provide resources, and encourage support networks. It has information on international schools, boarding schools, private and public schools in the Washington,

DC, area, home schooling, allowances, college admissions, and on third culture kids (TCKs). It also maintains an extensive Web site devoted to educational issues with links for more information. The Internet address is <http://www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/> and the telephone number is (202) 647-1076. You may also e-mail questions to [flo@state.gov](mailto:flo@state.gov).

- The CLO at your post of assignment will have a wealth of information on the available schools at that post and likely could put you in touch with other parents who have children of a similar age. Contact FLO for information on how to get in touch with the appropriate CLO.

Usually the overseas schools take on a flavor of the host country. In some countries the international school may have many students who are from the local culture. In other countries students at the international school may come from dozens of other countries. Among the American and international schools that are assisted by the Department of State, the children of U.S. Government employees make up only 10 percent of the total school population. Your children will not only learn a great deal about the culture and country where you are living, but about many other countries as well.

With the exception of the few Department of Defense schools, the schools which children attend abroad are usually non-profit, independent schools, controlled by a local school board. Though they may be called "The American School of Whasisitland," they are not owned or operated by the U.S. Government or the Department of State.

The Department of State does offer advice and support to families and schools through A/OPR/OS. Experienced U.S. educators serve as regional education officers (REOs), each assigned oversight of a geographic region, who are well informed about schools attended by U.S. Government school-age dependent children. You are encouraged to contact the REOs by e-mail or telephone for specific information about the schools in the country where you are assigned or contemplating an assignment. When they visit your post, be sure to participate in meetings they call for parents so you can share knowledge about the local school situation with them. Contact information can be found on the Internet at <http://www.state.gov/m/a/os/c1686.htm>.

A/OPR/OS provides financial, professional, and technical support to the schools the Department assists. This support can be in the form of grants, curriculum advice, board training, regional conferences, administration and faculty training, and/or other services as requested by these schools.

It also recommends to embassies and the Office of Allowances which schools are deemed adequate. Adequate is defined as: "an elementary or secondary school not requiring mandatory denominational religious instruction and providing an educational curriculum and services reasonably comparable to those normally provided without charge in public schools in the United States. The major criterion of 'adequacy' is whether a child of normal ability, upon completion of a grade, or its equivalent, can enter the next higher grade in a public school in the United States."

The REOs also determine which school at post is the closest to an American-style education, and that is the school on which the *at-post* education allowance will be based. You can call on these regional experts for specific information about the schools in the country where you are assigned or contemplating an assignment.

## **BOARDING SCHOOL**

You may not be able to imagine considering a boarding school for your child, but the time may come when it is your best choice. When the school at post is not adequate (as based on the above definition) there will be an away-from-post allowance, commonly referred to as the boarding school allowance. This amount varies from post to post since it is based on an average of 30 boarding schools' costs and three round-trip airfares to the nearest place where American curriculum boarding schools exist. If the school at post is deemed "adequate," then the away-from-post allowance is based on the amount authorized for the local "adequate" school. Parents may use this money toward the cost of boarding school, but will have to pay out of pocket for the remainder of expenses. For more information on boarding schools and making these choices, see the FLO paper, *The Boarding School Option* (<http://www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/rsrscs/pubs/>). The FLO Education and Youth Officer is the resource for boarding school information.

If you make the decision to send your child to a boarding school, two very important issues should be discussed in advance: communication and finances.

### **Communication**

Parents overseas should develop alternate systems for communicating with their children while they are abroad. A family friend or relative can be identified if the parents cannot be reached. If the student is under 18, parents should consider leaving a power of attorney with this adult who could arrange for hospital admission, give permission for an operation, or otherwise act for the parent in matters involving health or school-related questions. Some boarding schools also require you to leave permission with them to act in loco parentis in case of emergency.

Other sources of assistance in emergency situations could include the Family Liaison Office, the country desk officer (with permission), or the school's Dean of Students. In case of death or serious injury to the student, the family at post can be notified through Department of State channels outlined in Chapter 20, "Contingency Planning."

### **Finances**

A clear discussion of finances and financial expectations can foster a student's independence and resourcefulness, as well as forestall serious misunderstandings. The distance from "home" and the inaccessibility of parents may make the school's recommended student expense allowance insufficient. Parents need to set up emergency access to funds: leaving money with a friend or relative, establishing a custodial bank

account, or providing the student with a credit card or ATM card. The State Department Federal Credit Union (SDFCU) (<http://www.sdfcu.org/>) will open an account in the name of any dependent of a Foreign Service member. A paycheck allotment can be deposited automatically to the student's account, ensuring a regular cash supply regardless of any delay or cutoff in communication.

Choosing the most appropriate method of providing emergency funds must take into consideration the student's reliability and experience in the use of money and credit. Clear parental guidelines should help prevent misunderstandings.

### **Miscellaneous Precautions**

Students should be briefed on key elements of Department of State regulations that apply directly to them, such as the importance of making advance plans for overseas travel, staying long enough at post to qualify for U.S. Government-reimbursed travel back to school, arranging for their personal effects to be brought to school with them, and knowing how to get a visa and keep it up to date.

The family should discuss in advance where the student will spend short holidays or where to go if the school is closed early for some reason.

If the student does not have a driver's license that can serve as identification, other identification should be obtained. Many state drivers' license divisions provide identification cards for non-drivers. In many situations, passports are not accepted as identification, and students will need to produce their original birth certificate and Social Security card.

Students should be prepared for medical emergencies by equipping them with cards showing their health insurance plan and entitlement. Parents should not necessarily rely only on school-sponsored health insurance plans. Some clinics are closed on holidays or have limited commitment to the student during certain types of illnesses or accidents (specifically, automobile accidents). Many provide no emergency services.

Students will need names and addresses of those who can give advice when the student faces the normal problems of being away from home. Telephone calls to post can be expensive, and e-mail does not provide personal contact. An important question to ask a prospective boarding school is what forms of support it does offer students. Often it will be a counselor, mentor, or advisory group. Parents should know who their child's advisor is and maintain close contact with that individual.

### **SPECIAL NEEDS**

If you have a child with special needs, you will need to do additional research both before bidding and before going to post. You will have to complete and track extra paperwork to obtain an official evaluation and special clearance for your child to go to post. On the positive side, you may benefit from special education allowances. Further resources are

available by linking to the FLO Web site section on special needs children at <http://www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/c1958.htm>. The site is essential reading for Foreign Service families with children who have or might have special needs.

Overseas schools may offer smaller classes and more individual attention, which could benefit your child. However, overseas schools assisted by the Department of State are not covered by U.S. legislation requiring public schools to provide a comparable education for children with special needs (Public Law 94.142). Some may be hesitant to accept children with anything more than mild learning difficulties because of the resources available to Foreign Service students with special needs. Even when the U.S. embassy holds a seat on the board, schools do not have to accept students they feel they cannot serve. It is critical for parents to research post options and to allow enough time for the relevant Department of State offices (Employee Consultation Service, Office of Allowances, Office of Overseas Schools, Family Liaison Office, and Human Resources) to complete their parts in helping to find a workable solution.

### **Evaluation Process**

In order to apply or qualify for the special needs education allowance, the Employee Consultation Service (ECS) (e-mail: [MEDECS@state.gov](mailto:MEDECS@state.gov)) must agree that the child meets the special needs definition. This office is a good starting point in the process of obtaining assistance. ECS staff helps parents arrange evaluations, which may include psychological, educational, speech/language, occupational therapy, and psychiatric assessments.

If a child is due for a medical clearance examination, the evaluations can be authorized by ECS as part of the clearance process. If potential problems are identified while the family is abroad, the special needs education allowance can cover diagnostic testing and the travel of a child and one parent to a testing site. Testing cannot be authorized if the family is posted to the United States, since U.S. public schools must provide evaluations of children with special educational needs. Overseas, the embassy health unit, CLO Coordinator, or Administrative Officer can help you begin this process. Testing can be a trying time for parent and child alike. If possible, look for professionals using a "team approach," in which they are all located at the same facility and coordinate their work. Going to one location for all evaluations can make the process easier.

### **Clearance Process**

Evaluation reports become part of the child's medical records and are used in determining medical clearance. The Office of Medical Services will only give clearance for posts where the child's developmental needs can be met. Parents are required to obtain written confirmation that a school at the proposed post of assignment can meet the child's needs. The child will not be cleared for a specific post until that information is provided to the Office of Medical Services.

If an evaluation is completed while the employee is in mid-tour, the child will be cleared to return to post. Before the child is cleared for an onward post, however, a letter from the proposed new school will be required.

### **Special Education Allowances**

Once a child's special needs have been properly identified in conjunction with a medical/educational authority, the overseas employee becomes eligible for the special education allowance on behalf of the child. Benefits are available from birth through the school year in which the child turns 21, if still in secondary school. A child less than three years old must have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) or an Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) or the equivalent prepared by a medical or educational professional in order to qualify for any education allowances. Parents are strongly encouraged to get regular ECS review and concurrence on the IEP.

The special education allowance can be used to fund services specified in the child's IEP or equivalent. Allowable expenses could include: school tuition, transportation, periodic diagnostic testing, rental of specialized equipment, individual tutoring, and more. Regulations on education allowance benefits can be found in the DSSR Section 276.8 (<http://www.state.gov/m/a/als/c1843.htm>).

### **Before Bidding**

Although it is time consuming, it is essential that you thoroughly investigate post resources and schools before bidding on posts, especially if you have a child with special needs. Do not assume that adequate services exist everywhere. The best place to begin is with the Office of Overseas Schools report "Overseas Schools Offering Support to Children with Special Needs." This report is available at all overseas posts and by request from the Office of Overseas Schools, and includes self-reported information on overseas special needs programs (including programs for highly gifted children). Contacting the Office of Overseas Schools' regional education officers will also be helpful.

After doing some research, you may wish to contact potential schools directly with questions about available resources. Remember that if your child has been evaluated as having a special need, he or she will only be cleared to go to post if you have confirmed that a school at post can meet his/her needs. Your potential post will be thoroughly scrutinized before your child is given a clearance. *If you bid on posts that do not have facilities for your child, your life will become infinitely more complicated.*

On a less official level, you may want to investigate posts to find out if there are any local prejudices or attitudes that could make your child's life difficult. Find people to contact at post (possibly through the CLO Coordinator or Administrative Officer) or use the Overseas Briefing Center's returnee file to find people who have recently returned. Online services such as Livelines sponsored by the Associates of the American Foreign Service Worldwide (AAFSW) may also be helpful if you are looking for anecdotal

information from Foreign Service members. This extra research may even help you identify exceptional opportunities for your child at a potential post.

### **Before Going**

Request from the child's current school a copy of the child's master and special education files. The National Center for Learning Disabilities recommends that families keep a collection of documents including:

- Copies of the child's individual education plans (IEP) describing the goals, objectives, and services for the child each year
- Assessment reports describing any disabilities
- Copies of all relevant medical statements
- Dated parental notes concerning the child (comments from professionals not recorded elsewhere, parents' goals and objectives, key staff and contact numbers at previous educational institutions and other information)

Get specific recommendations from people currently working with your child. If you explain that you are moving to another country where services may not be available, these professionals will often be happy to cooperate, providing specific, detailed therapeutic programs, plans, and recommendations. Ask if there are therapeutic activities you can learn to do with your child.

Find out if there are items you will not be able to obtain at post (therapy equipment, learning aids, etc.) and look for alternatives. Locate a mail order company that can send them, if you can receive packages at post, or buy supplies in the United States and ship them with your household effects.

### **At Post**

Once at post, you will want to meet with school personnel to discuss the educational or therapeutic strategies that will be implemented to help your child. They will need to see the most recent assessment of your child's needs and abilities, and will be interested to know more about your child's developmental history and progress, so prior records are also important. As the parent, you will continue to play an important role in the school/home partnership. Be sure to keep ECS updated on your child's development.

Take advantage of all that your new post offers. Local salaries may be low enough to allow you to hire private tutors or therapists you might not be able to afford in the United States. You may be able to train someone to work one-on-one with your child if you have gathered the right information and prepared in advance.

Look for activities where your child is welcome (dance classes, sports programs, etc.) Ask if there are any local support groups. If not, find other interested parents and professionals and start one; this will help your family and make a lasting contribution to your host country.

Educating a child with special needs overseas is a challenge. Each case is unique, and some disabilities are particularly problematic. With the help of professionals, parents or guardians must determine the best course of action for both child and family. In some cases, the best choice may be to return to or stay in the United States. With sufficient planning and preparation, however, there are cases where the child with special needs can thrive in the overseas environment.

## **SUMMARY OF RESOURCES**

### **State Department Resources**

Offices that serve as education resources for Foreign Service families are the Office of Overseas Schools, the Family Liaison Office, the Overseas Briefing Center, the Employee Consultation Service, the Office of Allowances, and the American Foreign Service Association (for scholarships).

#### **Office of Overseas Schools (A/OPR/OS)**

Room H328, SA-1

Department of State

Washington, DC 20522-0132

Tel: (202) 261-8200

Fax: (202) 261-8224

Website: <http://www.state.gov/m/a/os/>

The Office of Overseas Schools is staffed with regional education officers (REOs), each assigned oversight of a geographic region, who are well-informed about schools attended by U.S. Government school-age children. Families are encouraged to contact the appropriate REO to discuss educational options at post. Contact information can be found on the Internet.

#### **Family Liaison Office (M/DGHR/FLO)**

Room 1239

Department of State

Washington, DC

8:15 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Tel: (202) 647-1076

Fax: (202) 647-1670

Website: <http://www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/>

E-mail: [flo@state.gov](mailto:flo@state.gov)

FLO's Education and Youth Officer gives information and counsel to families and Community Liaison Office Coordinators on education options at posts overseas, U.S. boarding schools, international day and boarding schools, Washington, DC, area public and private schools, correspondence courses (kindergarten-adult), the college admissions process, financial aid, standardized educational testing, children with special educational needs, and summer programs. Working with the Transition Center's Training Division and the Office of Overseas Schools, FLO's Education Officer presents seminars on educating

the Foreign Service child. The officer also works with the Foreign Service teen group Around the World in a Lifetime (AWAL), and the pre-teen group Globe Trotters through the Foreign Service Youth Foundation (FSYF).

**Employee Consultation Service (M/MED/ECS)**

Office of Medical Services Main Office

Room H246

2401 E Street, NW

Washington, DC

8:15 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Tel: (202) 663-1815

Fax: (202) 663-1613

E-mail: [MEDECS@state.gov](mailto:MEDECS@state.gov)

The Employee Consultation Service has three staff psychiatric social workers. They offer consultation, evaluation, and referral services to families of U.S. Government employees assigned to diplomatic posts abroad who have school-aged children with learning, emotional, or other disabilities. Walk-ins are welcome, or you may schedule an appointment.

**American Foreign Service Association Scholarship Program**

2101 E Street NW

Washington, DC 20037

Tel: (202) 944-5504

Fax: (202) 338-6820

Website: <http://www.afsa.org/scholar/index.html>

The Associates of American Foreign Service Worldwide (AAFSW) and the American Foreign Service Association (AFSA) provide merit-based scholarships to high school seniors for their freshman year in college. AFSA also provides need-based financial aid for undergraduates.

**Transition Center (M/FSI/TC)**

**Overseas Briefing Center (M/FSI/TC/OBC)**

**Training Division (M/FSI/TC/T)**

George P. Shultz National Foreign Affairs Training Center

Room E2126

4000 Arlington Blvd

Arlington, VA

8:15 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Tel.: (703) 302-7277

Fax: (703) 302-7452

Website: <http://www.state.gov/m/fsi/tc>

OBC e-mail: [FSIOBCInfoCenter@state.gov](mailto:FSIOBCInfoCenter@state.gov)

Training e-mail: [FSITCTraining@state.gov](mailto:FSITCTraining@state.gov)

The Transition Center offers resources for parents and children through the OBC and the Training Division. OBC keeps files on post schools, including handbooks, newsletters, personal comments, and yearbooks. They have slides or videotapes for some schools. No

appointment is necessary. The Training Division conducts courses and presentations on education for both parents and children. Some of the seminars are conducted in cooperation with the Family Liaison Office.

**Office of Allowances (A/OPR/ALS)**

Room H426, SA-1

Department of State

Washington, DC 20522-0104

9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Tel: (202) 261-8700

Fax: (202) 261-8707

Website: <http://www.state.gov/m/a/als/>

E-mail: [AllowancesO@state.gov](mailto:AllowancesO@state.gov)

The Office of Allowances can answer specific questions on school allowances for each post, and it sets special education and supplemental education allowances. Many questions can be answered by phone or e-mail. The DSSR is available on both the Intranet and Internet at the above addresses.

These offices are also listed in the FLO resource paper *Education Information Resources in the Department of State* (<http://www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/c1958.htm>).